Greensboro Lunch Counter

2 West Wallace H. Coulter Unity Square

Racial segregation was still legal in the United States on February 1, 1960, when four African American college students sat down at this Woolworth counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Politely asking for service at this “whites only” counter, their request was refused. When asked to leave, they remained in their seats. Their sit-in drew national attention and helped ignite a youth-led movement to challenge inequality throughout the South.

In Greensboro, hundreds of students, civil rights organizations, churches, and members of the community joined in a six-month-long protest. Their commitment ultimately led to the desegregation of the F. W. Woolworth lunch counter on July 25, 1960.

Ezell A. Blair Jr. (now Jibreel Khazan), Franklin E. McCain, Joseph A. McNeil, and David L. Richmond were students enrolled at the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College when they began their protest.

Protests such as this led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which finally outlawed racial segregation in public accommodations.

The closing of the Greensboro Woolworth's in 1993 presented museum curators with the opportunity to acquire this historic artifact. After extensive negotiations with Woolworth's executives and representatives of the local community, a small section of the lunch counter was donated to the Smithsonian.

Director's Statement
April 28, 2025

The Woolworth lunch counter and stools from Greensboro, North Carolina, where college students sat in protest of segregation during the Civil Rights Movement are and continue to be on display. These objects have been on view for more than 30 years and their display is central to our mission to explore, preserve and share the complexity of our past. The landmark display will be featured as one of the 250 revolutionary objects in our upcoming commemoration of the semiquincentennial. Our exhibition, *In Pursuit of Life, Liberty & Happiness* </explore/exhibitions/in-pursuit>, will open in March 2026 as a bold and immersive experience across all three exhibition floors of the National Museum of American History. Suggestions that the Smithsonian had planned or intended to remove the lunch counter and stools are false. Daily, thousands of visitors view and learn from these cherished objects in the national collection.

Anthea M. Hartig, Ph.D.
Elizabeth MacMillan Director

Video: Reflections on the Greensboro Lunch Counter

Transcript
YouTube (Privacy Policy <https://www.google.com/intl/en/policies/privacy/>, Terms of Service <https://www.youtube.com/t/terms>)

More information

- Article: The Moment When Four Students Sat Down to Take a Stand <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/lessons-worth-learning-moment-greensboro-four-sat-down-lunch-counter-180974087/> (Smithsonian Magazine)
- Article: Remembering Franklin McCain, member of the Greensboro Four </explore/stories/remembering-franklin-mccain-member-greensboro-four>
- Article: Thoughts at a lunch counter </explore/stories/thoughts-lunch-counter>
- Article: Seizing justice: The Greensboro 4 </explore/stories/seizing-justice-greensboro-4>
- Collection record: Greensboro Lunch Counter </collections/object/nmah_1159229>
- Online exhibition: *Separate is Not Equal: Brown v. Board of Education* <https://americanhistory.si.edu/brown/history/6-legacy/freedom-struggle-2.html>

F. W. Woolworth Co. in Greensboro, North Carolina

Media elements for this exhibition are made possible by History Channel | A+E Networks.

Hours & Admission

Open every day, except December 25, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Admission is free and no tickets are required.

Location & Contact

1300 Constitution Ave NW,
Washington, DC 20560 <https://www.google.com/maps/place/smithsonian+national+museum+of+american+history/@38.8912835,-77.0322449,17z>

Contact Information </about/contact>

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